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Developments in Indochina

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State Dept. review
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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

(Information as of 1500)

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Exiles in Paris have had their hopes deflated about any significant role in the "third force" in South Vietnam.

LAOS

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Combat levels are very low. The rightists are still grumbling about the agreement

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Moscow is afraid the rightists will upset the Laos peace settlement and is disappointed it did not provide for Chinese troop withdrawals from the northwest.

CAMBODIA

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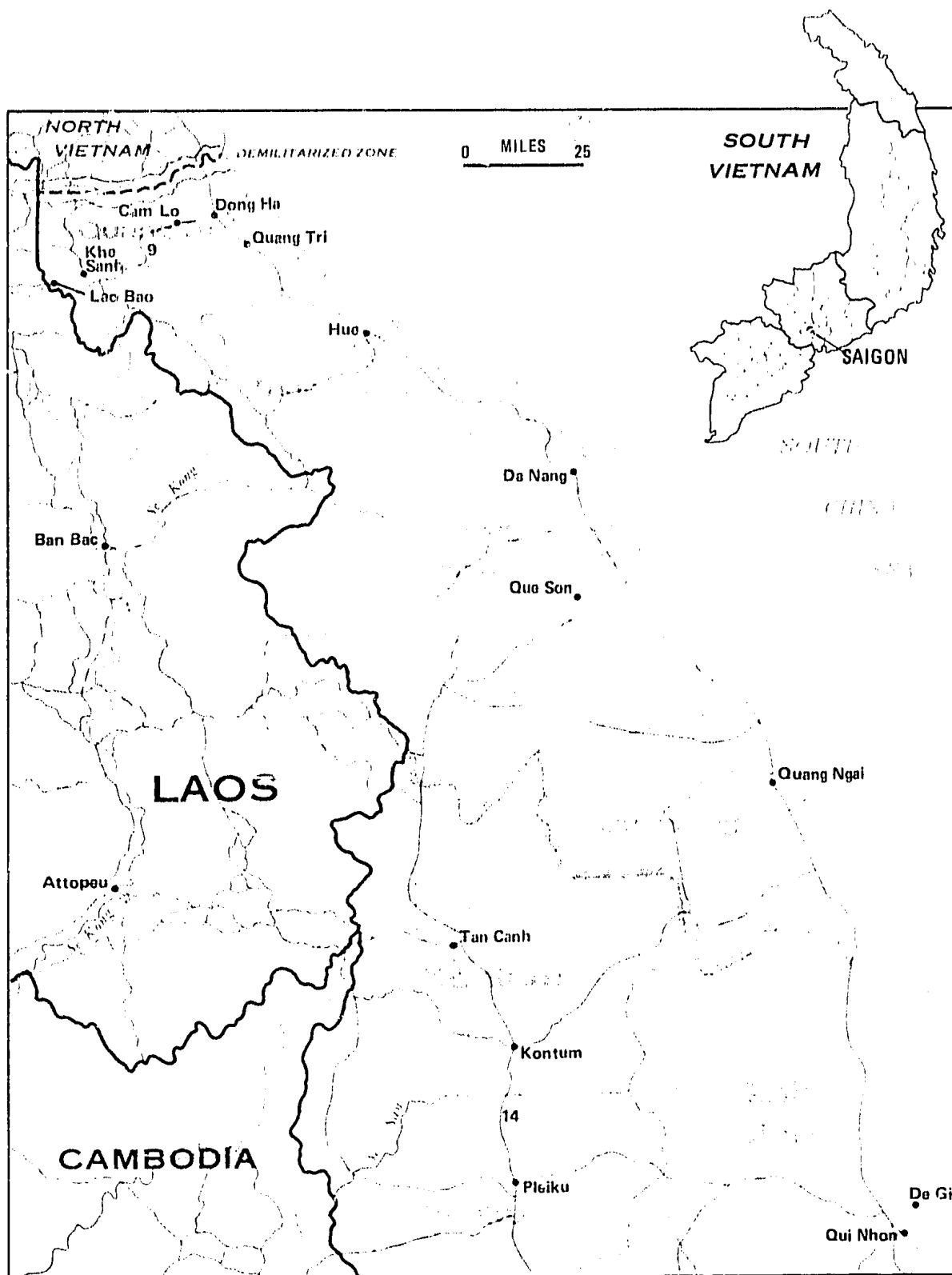
Sirik Matak thinks he could work with Peking to start negotiations.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Hanoi is openly discussing the need for current logistic support to Laos and to South Vietnam in its army daily.

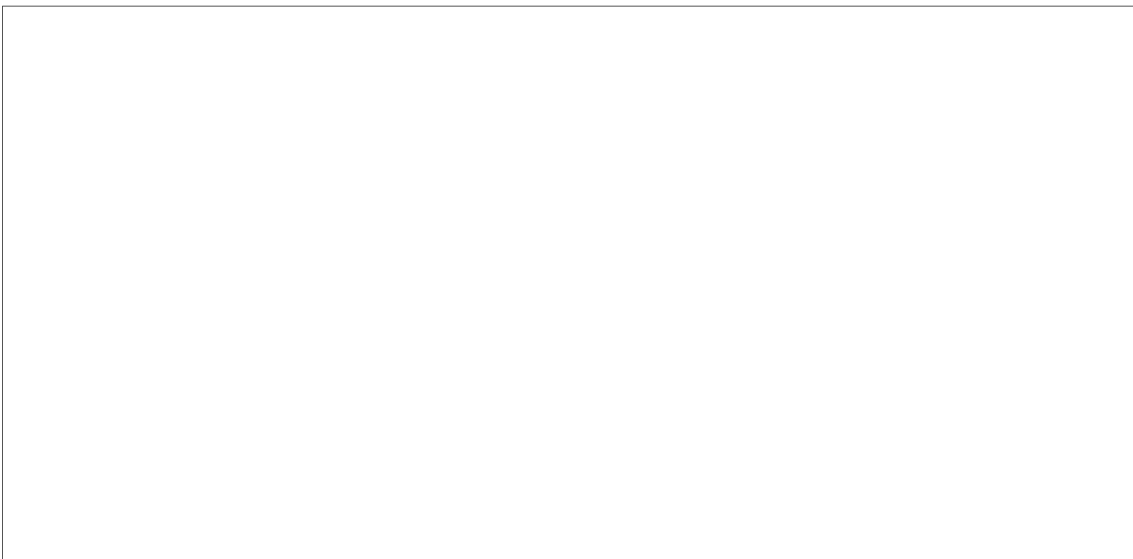
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SOUTH VIETNAM

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In Binh Dinh Province, sporadic fighting continues along the coast near the South Vietnamese radar site at De Gi hamlet. According to the US Embassy, the Communists are mounting attacks daily in the area and may hope to capture the hamlet for use as a shallow-draft port. In the highlands, Route 14 is open between Kontum and Pleiku cities, but there are still pockets of North Vietnamese resistance along the road.

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Exile Hopes Deflated

Vietnamese exiles in Paris, hoping to be part of a "third force" in a new government, came out of a recent meeting with a top Vietnamese Communist official somewhat disillusioned. The exiles, meeting with Dinh Ba Thi, chief of the PRG delegation to the bilateral Vietnam talks, were told that Saigon and the Communists had made no progress in determining the composition of the third segment of the National Council for Reconciliation and Concord.

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[REDACTED]

Thi claimed that in the PRG view, only political forces actually in South Vietnam could play a role. He encouraged exiles aspiring to political office to return to South Vietnam as soon as possible. Thi promised to make immediate arrangements for any interested individual to go to PRG-controlled areas of Vietnam. He told the exiles, however, that to be effective they would eventually have to become active in the Saigon political arena.

The exile leaders apparently left the meeting in a state of frustration since few of them see much prospect of being allowed in by the Thieu regime. In view of indications that both Communists and the Thieu government have written off the Paris exiles because of their disunity and lack of contacts in Vietnam, Thi may well have been telling them politely that they were unlikely to have much of a political role in postwar Vietnam. [REDACTED]

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LAOS

The level of combat continues to decline. The only significant combat on 28 February occurred in the southern panhandle, where the North Vietnamese are still trying to push the few remaining government troops from the northern Bolovens Plateau. Fragmentary reports indicate that shelling and ground attacks forced irregulars from remaining positions near Route 23 south of Thateng. Most of these troops are now attempting to regroup mid-way between Thateng and Paksong. In north Laos, Communist gunners on 28 February fired several heavy barrages at government positions six miles west of Bouam Long, the government fortress north of the Plaine des Jarres. General Vang Pao has ordered Lao T-28s to bomb enemy positions in the Bouam Long area on 1 March in retaliation for these attacks.

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Rightists Feel Left Out

The Lao rightists continue to grumble about their minor role in negotiations with the Communists.

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the Communist representatives were obviously marking time until senior Communist envoy Phoumi Vongvichit returned from consultations in Hanoi and Sam Neua.

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rightists think that most decisions will be made in private discussions between Phoumi and Souvanna or Souvanna's special envoy, Pheng Phongsavan.

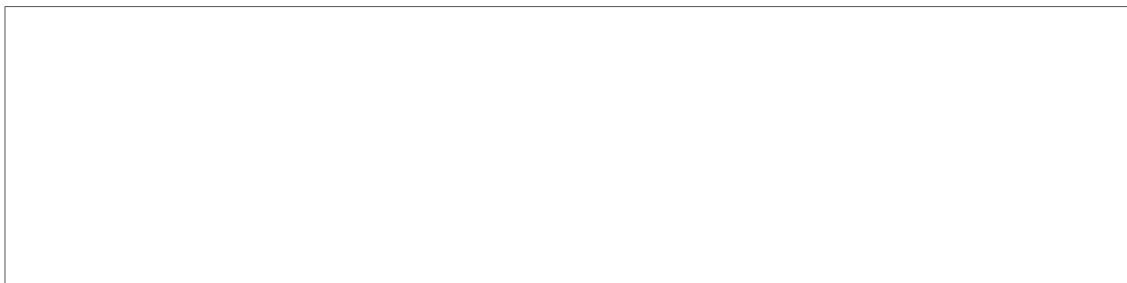
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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Moscow is worried that the rightists in Laos may somehow try to disrupt the recently concluded Lao cease-fire and that Chinese troops will remain in northwest Laos. These concerns came through clearly in a conversation initiated by the Soviet ambassador in Vientiane with his US counterpart on 27 February. Ambassador Vdovin pressed hard for reassurances that the US still supports Souvanna and was counseling the rightists to accept the agreement. He also probed for signs of US opposition to a continuing Chinese presence in northern Laos. Vdovin claimed to have heard conflicting stories about whether the Chinese would withdraw and expressed considerable frustration over the unwillingness of the Chinese even to acknowledge their activities to the Soviets. He said he would soon be discussing the question with the Lao Communist negotiator Phoumi Vongvichit.

Moscow wants a more stable Indochina so that the USSR can get on with its policies of detente with the US and Western Europe. At the same time, however, the Soviets want to ensure that Communist advantages from the cease-fire accrue only to the North Vietnamese and their clients in Indochina--not to the Chinese. The Soviets probably expected the US would encourage Souvanna to raise the issue of Chinese road-building activity in Laos in the cease-fire talks, and they are doubtless upset that thus far the question has not publicly surfaced.

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REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

An 11 February editorial in the North Vietnamese Army newspaper, *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, discusses in unusually open fashion the importance of Hanoi's current transportation and logistic activities. According to the editorial, the "Quang Trung" army unit--almost certainly the North Vietnamese 559th Transportation Group that is responsible for moving supplies out of North Vietnam to Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam--is "surging forward with a very seething new emulation movement." The editorial specifically praises two North Vietnamese transportation units and notes that both had been awarded the honorary title of "hero unit" by the National Assembly. The 743rd Transportation Battalion is responsible for delivering supplies to Communist forces in northern Laos.

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The editorial discusses the difficulties surrounding the transportation effort and says that all of them must be overcome and the cargo delivered. Transportation troops, the editorial adds, have a "very serious" responsibility. The editorial states that the "transportation conditions are more advantageous than before, but the requirements are higher."

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